

# **Ella Fitzgerald**

by Kyle Stanton

The field of the arts is so vast, that to decide an influential individual woman was a daunting task. I broke the arts into categories like art, music, and literature. Music interested me the most of these three, and the second I decided on music my mind shot straight to "The First Lady of Song," Ella Fitzgerald. Not only is she one of the most influential people, man or woman, in music, she is one of the most important women in history.

Finding her way out of trouble as a child in Yonkers, New York, Fitzgerald debuted at the Apollo Theater in New York City. She was an instant star, with a pure voice and wide vocal range. Several big-band bands wanted Fitzgerald to be their lead singer and she signed on with Tiny Bradshaw in 1935 at age 18. Leaving the band scene in 1942 to pursue her solo career, she was releasing hit songs regularly and was a nationwide phenomenon. Her career dwindled in the 1960s and 70s but fans all over still loved her music.

Off the stage and onto the big screen and television, Fitzgerald landed several screen roles. She was mainly in signing roles in these movies but still made herself a niche in acting. On television, Fitzgerald was featured numerous times in guest roles and many more in commercials ranging from Memorex to Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Ella Fitzgerald revolutionized the music industry. Here was a young, black woman who stood up and sang in front of huge crowds. Today that would be very commonplace. But back when she started her career in the 1930s, women still had a very hard time making a name for themselves. Music was almost exclusively for males, but Fitzgerald did not care or even seem to take notice. She sang far better than most men and her fans did not care that she was a woman.

They acknowledged her as a very talented person who churned out amazing pieces of music. A bigger shock was the fact that she was African-American. Fitzgerald started her singing career in Harlem for primarily black audiences but her voice needed to be shared with the world, not just a small group. Even in the northern states, race was a larger divider between people. Fitzgerald bridged the gap and proved to the world that it does not matter if she was a woman or black, she could flat out sing and changed the face of music. Almost like Jackie Robinson, she broke down barriers in entertainment that the world is grateful no longer stand today.

Awarded the National Medal of Art and the Presidential Medal of Freedom towards the end of her life, Ella Fitzgerald truly capitalized on opportunities given to her and carved out some of her own if the world was not ready to concede. People today still look up to Fitzgerald as a pioneer in the music world and the rest of the world too. Her legacy extends beyond music, she bridged gaps and showed anybody can do what they love and want to do. I think that after Ella Fitzgerald started becoming a huge jazz star, the traditions of discrimination were given a second thought and many people disbanded their opinions of women and African Americans because this one was incredible. Bing Crosby says, "Man, woman, or child, Ella is the greatest of them all."